FOCUSING ON FIRST NATIONS YOUTH VOICES IN A HALQ'EMÉYLEM LANGUAGE COURSE GRADES 9-12

by

Nicole Joseph

Bachelor of Arts, University of the Fraser Valley 2011

Associate of Arts, University of the Fraser Valley 2011

Certificate in Teacher Education, University of the Fraser Valley 2015

MAJOR PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL

FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION

(EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND MENTORSHIP)

In the
Teacher Education Department

UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY

2021

Approval

Name: Nicole Joseph

Degree: Master of Education (Educational Leadership and Mentorship)

Title: Focusing on First Nations Youth Voices in a Halq'eméylem Language Course Grades 9-12

Examining Committee:

Name: Dr. Joanne Robertson

MEd Chair or Designate, Teacher Education Department

_____

Name: Dr. Nikki Yee

Senior Supervisor

Educational Consultant

_____

Name: Dr. Awneet Sivia

Second Reader

MEd Chair or Designate, Teacher Education Department

_____

Date Defended/Approved: June 11, 2021

Abstract

Indigenous languages are important to the growth, empowerment, and identity of Indigenous youth (Anthony-Stevens & Stevens, 2017). This study is about gathering youth voices to improve Halq'eméylem languages classes for all learners. The research question that guides this study is 'What are students' perspectives of their current high school heritage language courses?'. Gathering perspectives is one step in improving second language programs, with the goal to see students as co-constructors of Halq'eméylem programs. A bounded intrinsic case study approach was used to examine student perspectives on their experience of Halq'eméylem language classes. Data was collected through questionnaires delivered through a school delivery system set up to meet COVID school protocols. Thematic coding was used to analyze qualitative and quantitative data. It was found that students look at language learning as a whole and consider language as a way of life that includes culture, history, spirituality, and the mechanics of language learning. Implications of restructuring language lessons are discussed in relation to a more authentic learning context.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge all the women in my life who, despite a myriad of obstacles, have become increasingly generous, magnanimous, and humble. The mostly unacknowledged work of women who constantly give and take care of others so selflessly inspires me every day. I would like to thank one woman who embodies all these traits, Kirsten Rempel, Sqeláwtiye. Because of her long tenure at the school, she is naturally looked to as a leader. When asked about her leadership, she quotes how meaningful John Maxwell's *The 360 Degree Leader* was for her when she realized that one can be a leader from any level in an organization. In her I see a genuine leader who serves from a place of passion that inspires others to find their area of passion also. Her humble unofficial mentorship reflects First Nations ways of teaching and learning. Thank you for all our conversations, for your unconditional support and understanding, and for your reflective nature that has made this journey an absolute joy!

I would like to acknowledge all First Nation communities who I have worked with and of which I have been a part. Traditional knowledge is a gift, and I want to thank all those who have shared their gifts with me. I am grateful for all the teachings, ceremonies, and events in which people share their hearts, stories, and language. I would like to thank a few women who have taught me about Halq'eméylem and the traditional knowledge of their ancestral and unceded territories, Xóyetlha Evangeline Point from Sts'áiles, Sulisulwut Bibiana Norris from Sts'áiles , Kóyálemót Mary Stewart from Stó:lô, Siyámíya Diane Kay from Seabird.

I want to thank all the instructors and staff at the University of the Fraser Valley, who have been a part of my journey. Throughout my undergraduate degree programs, my teaching certificate, and this Master's, *education* has changed the way I approach life and the choices I make, and it is shaping who I am and how I approach my children and my students. I struggle

with a curious ‘imposter syndrome’ that leads me to doubt my abilities, but I have been encouraged in different ways through my instructors’ passion, dedication, and authenticity during this program. Thank you for your teachings, time, and support. I am proud to have done my schooling at a University that acknowledges traditional territory, knowledge, and culture.

Dedication

Victoria Dumaresq and Ethan Reid,

You will always be the best things that have ever happened to me. You have taught me that life is about pursing your dreams and living life to your absolute best every day. Thank you for being my inspiration and giving me joy, knowledge, and experiences, I could never have done this without you.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Éy Swáyel[1]

Éy swáyel mekw'wat! Nicole Joseph tel skwix. Telí tsel kw'a Wet'suwet'en. Angela Joseph te skwixs thel tá:l[2]. As is traditional in First Nations communities, this work was started with a welcome and an introduction. I have introduced myself in Halq'eméylem as this is the traditional language of the territory within which I work, live, and play. The traditional opening also includes the purpose of the gathering, in this case the purpose of this study is to answer the question 'What are students' perspectives of their current high school heritage language courses?'.

I am learning a language within a territory that is not my own. My mother was taken during what is now known as the 'Sixties Scoop' – the forced removal of First Nations children from natural families to foster care or adoption with White families. Being geographically, emotionally, and culturally removed from my home territory has led to years of deep reflection about Indigenous language and culture. During the process of learning Halq'eméylem, I have been saddened by the thought of not learning my heritage language (the language from one's home territory), yet this has motivated me to learn and teach Halq'eméylem (the language of my new territory (Flores, Gurel, & Putnam, 2020), and to strive to become a driver of pedagogical change for First Nations language instruction.

Mekw' tel sq'èq'ó[3]

---

[1] Good Day- Beginning of a greeting or conversation. At times *Halq'eméylem* is used in the paper to expand scholarly understanding through different worldviews.

[2] Good day everyone! My name is Nicole Joseph, and I am from Wet'suwet'en. My mother's name is Angela Joseph.

[3] All my relations

This simple, yet powerful, phrase which means, “All my relations”, is spoken often to conclude an introduction or to affirm the work being undertaken (Gardner, 2000). This phrase is powerful for me because of my own disconnection from language and culture. It is the connection that language provides to culture, life/worldviews, nature, and each other, that serves to keep me inspired to connect with the local community and my students. Reflecting upon my students’ innate language and cultural opportunities motivates me to provide the best Halq’eméylem program available. The word Mekw’ is derived from méxweya which means ‘belly button’, the source of all of our *connection*. “Mekw’ tel sq’èq’ó" takes that primal connection and extends it, extends *us,* to connect not only with our family, but also to connect to our community, our ancestors, the land, and *all* living things (Gardner, 2000). For me, this phrase also invokes the idea of connection between everything (animate and ‘inanimate’)/all energy sources. Connection is important to someone who, like me, was also displaced from their home and who might find themselves in *my* home territory, learning the language I was unable to learn. Perhaps the need for that connection will prompt them to revitalize that language, which is not their own, as I am doing with Halq’eméylem. This hope is rooted in mekw’ tel sq’èq’ó, which evokes the deep connection Indigenous People share who rises above a history of displacement (Gardner, 2000; Archibald, 2008; Little Bear, 2000).

Yó:ysáwt[4]

Working for a First Nations organization with youth ages 13-18 for six years gave me insight as an educator to encourage students to stand in their own power, and to strengthen their

[4] Work or place of work. ‘Áwt’ is a room or building. The word ‘work’ is used in *Halq’eméylem* and is nominalized (turned into a noun) which reflects the ‘good work’ being done in the building- ‘áwt’ suffix indicating building.

own voice by exploring their identity, background, culture, and beliefs. This experience gave me the desire to become a teacher. Once I graduated from the Teacher Education Program, I gained a position at a First Nations school helping to build lesson plans for the Halq'eméylem language program. The First Nations school where this study takes place is part of a self-governing Band that is within traditional Stó:lô territory, but which considers itself to be its own entity within the Nation.

Within this context in which I work, it is important to mention that I had no experience with the language; however, there were two veteran language speakers at the school whom I was able to shadow. I soon took on the task of building full lesson plans compatible with both school protocols and Halq'eméylem language curriculum standards. The lesson plan building initiative was a success, and my principal soon asked that I also start *teaching* language courses in some of our high school classes. With only a year of experience with the language, I felt my proficiency needed work, so I enrolled in the two-year Halq'eméylem language certificate program in the evening after work. As I was learning the language, I began building lessons that reflected what *I* was learning at the same time. This led to the construction of the high school language courses that include teaching students the grammar part of the language, which was a new approach in our school.

Stá:xwelh[5]

I taught the language for four years, revising the courses and lessons each year as I also developed and grew in my understanding of the language. It was at this time that I decided to

[5] Children – referring to students. The word for children here is used in the context to refer to students which reflects the community's commitment to our 'children as our greatest resource'.

apply for my Masters, hoping to find a way to include *student* voice in the constant revision of the courses and language lessons that I was creating. While I was constantly learning and revising the courses, I realized how important it would be to include students as co-constructors of the lessons, which would reflect *their* opinions and abilities, and incorporate strategies that work for them in learning the language.

As such, the impetus for this research was to explore student perspectives of a heritage language course, in this case, Halq'eméylem, with a goal to build a program in which students can see *themselves*. Such a program focuses on culture and identity in language learning for First Nations students. Therefore, my research question is 'What are students' perspectives of their current high school heritage language courses?'. My focus is primarily on the students and it is my hope that students will be empowered by participating in the process of giving their feedback and seeing their thoughts drive the development of a more student-centric heritage language curriculum.

Context

This study highlights important contextual factors that impact the way in which Halq'eméylem can be taught. These include the environmental factors of the community and the classroom, and student self-identity in the expansion of the Halq'eméylem program.

Environmental Factors

Foundationally, the loss of heritage language speakers is a direct result of years of Western colonization and cultural extermination. Halq'eméylem, part of the Salish language family and has only the eldest generation of speakers possessing a functional fluency of the language (Flores, Gurel, & Putnam, 2020). Halq'eméylem has only *one fluent speaker* still alive, necessitating the creation of school-based programs to teach Halq'eméylem as a second

language. Statistics from 2001 have shown there to be an increase in Salish second language learners (Norris, 2006). As Halq'eméylem is a critically-endangered language, immersion is next to impossible – there simply are not enough fluent teachers to create such programs. Despite this limitation, the Band (the self-governing community in which the research takes place) is supporting the school and community to reclaim its heritage language through the development of Halq'eméylem programs for students and families. The Band Council, in partnership with the school, has prioritized Halq'eméylem language instruction from preschool to grade 12 since the opening of the school.

Another environmental factor is the classroom and those factors that influence how the classroom operates. As educators we have a certain autonomy to create a place at school that includes the structure, space, materials, groupings, and classroom-management techniques utilized (Toulouse, 2016); however, it is vitally important to be aware of the home and societal expectations, pressures, and other student realities. First Nations students have a unique reality in which many struggle with meeting basic needs, and deal with intergenerational trauma, and social media which often reflects the dehumanization of minority cultural identities (Battiste, 2013; Norris, 2011). Understanding broad First Nations history, as well as community values, is important when developing curriculum and creating a classroom context for students with a First Nations background.

A final environmental factor for the school in which this study takes place is a long-standing school-wide program that addresses trauma and self-regulation. The program is called 'Restitution', which comes from a philosophy of discipline based on intrinsic motivation, by Diane Gossen based on William Glasser's Control Theory principles (Gossen, 2020). The successful use of this program can offer several lessons for curricular development of

Halq'eméylem in this school. The historical deterioration of language and culture has had a far-reaching impact on current First Nations students, but the Restitution response helps students self-regulate and participate in the group strengthened, and with a stronger sense of identity, in much the same way as does an effective heritage language program. Intrinsically-motivated students will be better prepared to move forward in all aspects of their lives, and developing intrinsic motivation is a bonus of the Restitution program because of the focus on student agency and identity. It is important to recognize, as with Restitution, that teaching a heritage language includes enhancing student cultural identity so they can contribute to the whole as strong individuals. Identity is the connection and strength of First Nations People, and the reason *language* is pivotal to school success. Another key take-away from Restitution is the emphasis on creating bonds of trust, and this is especially important in the context of language learning as students need to know that the educators are listening to *them*. Building on the current foundation of Restitution in the school, the Halq'eméylem language program is intended to similarly build student identity and autonomy.

Expanding the Halq'eméylem Program

Considering the prevalent environmental factors, and the need for language learning to encompass cultural identity, it is important to consider the scope and impact of the current Halq'eméylem language program. One way of expanding the Halq'eméylem language program is co-constructing the language course with students, which may increase intrinsic motivation. Studies have shown that intrinsic motivation promotes positive outcomes for youth, such as enhanced academic achievement and a sense of self-worth (Froiland, Davison, & Worrell, 2016). Students engaged in a successful heritage language program are set to gain strength, self-confidence, and the necessary skills, that in turn may foster their autonomy and independence.

This study seeks to explore how this foundation of student autonomy might lead students to become active agents of language revitalization.

This idea involves capturing and understanding the voices and perspectives of the students taking the courses. Students who are able to contribute to the process of language programs are more likely to become lifelong learners of heritage languages because they can see themselves within the educational process and development (Battiste, 2013; Norris, 2006). In successful language programs, students who saw their heritage or second language as a pathway to university were more likely to succeed in pursuing success in post-secondary education (Anthony-Stevens & Stevens, 2017). Developing a better self-image of hereditary identity may aid students in seeing themselves as *whole* and lends strength to the development of individual voice (Little Bear, 2000; Battiste, 2013). In this way the individual is 'decolonized' and returned to a state of being that aligns with their culture and heritage (Anthony-Stevens & Stevens, 2017; Beaven, 2019).

When students ask why they *have to* learn Halq'eméylem it is important to remind students that they *get to* learn their language, because for so many years it was not permitted. While Halq'eméylem is obligatory for local First Nations schools it is becoming an elective in local school districts as well. The reason for language learning is that language informs purpose, intent, understandings, and beliefs (Norris, 2006). When students understand that 'everything has knowledge', a foundational First Nations concept (Little Bear, 2000), they begin to understand that they are part of a whole, and the respect for themselves and the people and environment around them becomes sacred.

Drawing on personal experience, viewed through the lens of the historical destruction of First Nations language, culture, and identity, it is clear to see how vital it is for students to learn

their own language and culture, and to find their own identity within it. This is supported by the strong stance the Band has taken on language learning and education in general, continually affirming ‘the children are our greatest resource’, stating it at every community gathering, and investing time and funds, in community language initiatives. These components are the inspiration for gathering the data to explore student perspectives of learning their heritage language.

Literature Review

When thinking about how to strengthen the current Halq’eméylem program, it is important to look at existing research. Determining the strengths of existing heritage language programs in other locations, and reviewing their success in language acquisition and language growth will provide ideas for applying similar strategies in a Halq’eméylem context. The goal of this study is to have students identify their own learning needs in First Nations language classrooms by exploring the question ‘What are students’ perspectives of their current high school heritage language courses?’. In addition to exploring the *successes* of language programs, it is also important to identify the *limitations* of language programs.

Success in Language Programs

Success has been found through multiple types of language programs prevalent in the literature – full immersion, medium immersion, and second language programs. Full immersion means that language is taught with no English or other languages spoken. This means that the heritage language is the only language which is spoken within the entire school, and no outside language is permitted (Guevremont & Kohen, 2019). Medium immersion programs offer core subjects, such as Math, Science, and Social Studies to be taught in the heritage language, while electives may be taught in English or another language (Guevremont & Kohen, 2019). Both

programs are associated with higher rates of graduation and increased success on standardized tests, and evidence suggests that this style of teaching lowers dropout rates (Albury, 2018; Guèvremont & Kohen, 2019; Norris, 2011; Singh et al., 2011). Second language learning refers to the heritage language being taught in class with English or another language as its primary language (Guevremont & Kohen, 2019). While immersion is not possible in this context these other programs offer vital information to inform this study.

Successful heritage language programs, where students engage with, speak in, and understand the language, share several important features that help them strengthen the language under study. Recent studies have found that successful language programs focus on student identity, culture, opportunities for language use, and tools, resources, and strategies to help students become life-long learners of their heritage language (Flores, Gurel, & Putnam, 2020; Singh & Reyhner, 2013; Norris, 2006). Success may look different in each community; however, all the powerhouse language programs have four things in common: first they all incorporate *cultural connection to identity*; second, they incorporate *student agency*, third they provide *opportunities to practice language* outside of the program; and fourth they all include a variety of *tools and resources* with which the students can engage the language (Albury, 2018; Anthony-Stevens & Stevens, 2017; Archibald, 2008).

Cultural Connection to Identity

Investing in second language instruction has shown to increase connections to "identity, land, and traditional knowledge" (Norris, 2006, p. 223). This knowledge is critical to language learning and should recognize that First Nations/Indigenous groups have distinctive stories, histories, cultures, and identities that are specific to their home territories (Norris, 2006). As such, language loss can be devastating, but learning the language can offer hope. There are

stories of cultural disconnection within Stó:lō territory, in which Indigenous People have grown up without knowing their language and culture. Ethel Garner reflects on learning her language as an adult and how she was defined as a "s'téxem[6]" – worthless because she did not know her history (Gardner, 2000, p. 8). Ethel describes the desire to revitalize Halq'eméylem to connect with her cultural roots (Gardner, 2000). Knowing that stories hold the traditional knowledge of Stó:lō history helps to connect individuals to the alignment of "Xwélmexws[7]" (Gardner, 2000, p. 10). It is through these "sx̲wōx̲wiyám[8]" that life teachings occur. Creation stories guide the collective moral development, and reveal the cyclical nature of the environment (Gardner, 2000, p. 10; Litte Bear, 2000). The sx̲wōx̲wiyám link people, land, ancestors, plants, animals, and even rocks together, each holding knowledge and power that is shared among each other (Gardner, 2000; Litte Bear, 2000). Creating a school-based language program that also draws upon the powerful messages of connection intrinsic to First Nations culture is essential to its success. It is through Ethel's story that we find the importance of incorporating culture into language learning, thus informing the potential development of student identity.

Student Agency

As today's students will be the drivers of saving the Halq'eméylem language, it is imperative that student voices are heard within the broader framework of the history and the curriculum (Cummins, 1992). Researcher Albert Bandura explores notions of human agency that include *intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness,* and *self-reflectiveness,* and gives a vision of what could be effective for student agency. Bandura's work presents a theory in which human

---

[6] Person who does not know their history.

[7] First Nations person. The word for First Nation person has the root 'mekw' in the word to emphasize the connection to everything else.

[8] Creation stories

development can transcend the dictates of human environment and give opportunities to shape one's 'life circumstances and the course of their lives' (Bandura, 2006, p. 164). Taking Bandura's human agency concepts and using them to enhance the current Halq'eméylem program, encourages student efficacy, and links language and students. A well-thought-out language program can be a tool for inclusivity and can be a key component to building intrinsic motivation within students, especially in First Nations schools. Bandura's ideas naturally build upon the principles of Restitution. In developing self-regulation skills which are integral to restitution, students are able to balance their often unique *pasts* within the classroom setting. Heritage language programs build *present* student identity and agency through connection with their culture. Bandura's ideas for creating human efficacy extend student skills for *future* achievements. This individualistic student achievement is hoped to extend to the cultural resiliency of heritage language speakers.

Intentionality. Intentionality is the idea that people influence their lives through organization, proactive decisions, and self-reflection. It is through intentionality that students will become drivers for language revitalization and for their own life circumstances, and not just be "products of them" (Bandura, 2006, p. 164). Intentional heritage language learners display a resilience that overcomes deficits created by assimilation and the historical systematic eradication of culture and language. Discovering which aspects of heritage language learning are most important to students, will allow for the creation of a more effective program that engages student intentionality for their own learning.

Forethought. Forethought is the property in which people set goals and make plans. If students see themselves in the programming of their heritage language, they may begin to visualize 'anticipated outcome(s)' and choose to find their place in their heritage language

journey (Bandura, 2006, p. 164). The prospect of 'future' language learning is now a possible reality, whereas historically, assimilation prevented any hope of fluency and growth in heritage languages as they were once criminalized. Student perceptions may be the key to purposeful growth, moving forward in these times of refocused attention on the preservation and promotion of heritage languages worldwide.

Self-reactiveness. Self-reactiveness is the intention to overcome obstacles of an action plan, in which students will be able to seek out resources, guidance, and help to ensure success in their heritage language goals. This process becomes important in learning a language that is near extinction, where the resources and speakers are limited. Thus, the ability to link choices and action are important to language development. Respected Elder Gwen Point, admonishes that it is critical the language learner takes on the responsibility of pushing forward their own language learning growth, being persistent and passionate, taking ownership of their language learning journey (G. Point, personal communication, 2018). Students who feel their voice and opinion are heard in language learning programing will be more likely to become independent autonomous learners.

Self-reflective. Self-reflective students not only become agents of change, but are "self-examiners of their own functioning" (Bandura, 2006, p. 165). Bandura suggests that peoples' histories may shape their identities and circumstances, but being self-reflective is a skill that will allow one to influence their own future (Bandura, 2006). While this is a large concept for most students, most Indigenous People have grown up with the idea of reciprocity as a function of collectivity– the idea that "people do not operate as autonomous agents" but rather "human functioning is a product of a reciprocal interplay of interpersonal, behavioral, and environmental determinants" (Bandura, 2006, p. 165). Students who begin to see themselves as integral parts of

the whole, balancing the collective past and personal history against future goals, may be more likely to choose to be agents of pedagogical change in heritage language programing.

Opportunities to Practice Language

Opportunities to practice language are paramount for successful language acquisition, and would traditionally happen at home or at cultural gatherings such as the smokehouse; however, these cultural practices became criminalized. When it comes to Halq'eméylem, learners in Coast Salish communities normally acquire fluency in English before they learn their heritage language due to these impacts. While it is certainly more desirable to have Halq'eméylem be learned in the home as a first language, studies have shown that it is possible to reverse 'language shift' (the slow extinction of an endangered language) through carefully designed school language programs (Berlin, 2000), especially in conjunction with building connections between the school program and the community.

Students with the highest rates of language acquisition come from homes in which at least one of the residents is fluent in the heritage language (Anthony-Stevens & Stevens, 2017; Battiste, 2013; Beaven, 2019; Norris, 2011; Guevremont & Kohen, 2019). Ideally, students have a language speaker at home or are exposed to cultural practices and ceremonies in which the heritage language is used (Anthony-Stevens & Stevens, 2017; Battiste, 2013; Davidson & Davidson, 2018; Morcom, 2017; Norris, 2011; Norris, 2006). Where possible, parents could enroll in local language programs to help increase youth exposure to language. Developing a community-based language program extension could be a goal for a second phase of development of the school-based program (Norris, 2006). Community connection and participation can be an integral part of developing an effective and long-term language program (Cummins, 1992).

Language learners who can engage in language opportunities with family, community, Elders, events, school programs, and ceremonies show an increase in oral development and language comprehension (Beaven, 2019).“[I]f we are to maintain any hope of keeping our languages viable and alive, it remains absolutely essential that we shift our focus from teaching our children words and phrases to passing on to them the ability to think and effectively communicate in our native languages.” (Greymorning, 1997, p. 29). Exchange in language is the reciprocity that includes students, community, and language programs, and it is these opportunities that enhance success. Other immersion programs around the world demonstrate that immersion leads to the greatest success in not only revitalizing a language, but also in overall student *academic* achievement, as “navigating a multilingual environment imparts advantages that transfer beyond language” (Marian & Shook, 2012, p. 8). Having language opportunities outside of a set language program, increases student ability to integrate speaking, reading, and writing, and will more naturally apply it in their day-to-day activities. This promotes a stronger grasp of the language, which subsequently contributes to improvement in students' academic achievement in other areas of study (Marian & Shook, 2012; Berlin, 2000). It is through these opportunities that students are able to engage with the language and acquire a well-rounded grasp of how it connects with all aspects of their academic journey.

Tools and Resources

The literature suggests that several other tools might be successful in heritage language courses. Language programs have found success including ‘community’ in the classroom – this approach ranges from inviting Elders and prominent community members into the classroom, to structuring lessons be more in line with community values (Albury, 2018; Anthony-Stevens & Stevens, 2017; Archibald, 2008; Beaven, 2019; Flores, Gurel, & Putnam, 2020). The process of

developing a second language program also includes creating or finding resources, and it can be important to reach out to other local Indigenous communities either online or in person (MacMath & Hall, 2018). Reaching out via phone and then in person is congruent in the First Nations worldview of reciprocity and relationships, as showing up in person is a display of commitment to your pedagogical practice. The relationship aspect of this process is the exchange of values, knowledge, and commitment to language revitalization.

Norris (2006) explains that languages near extinction have the best chance of survival through recording, archiving, and documenting all language through any means possible (see also Anthony-Stevens & Stevens, 2017; Battiste, 2013; Morcom, 2017; Norris, 2006). Resource sharing becomes more important as we create new material and programs. Aids such as Brent Galloway's (year) "Dictionary of Upriver Halkomelem, Volume 1" and the First Voices website, are helping to preserve the vocabulary, grammar rules, and syntax of the language, but the language only lives in its heritage form in its last fluent speaker, Siyámiyatéliyot Elizabeth Phillips. Collecting a variety of tools ranging from the tangible (e.g., dictionaries and recordings) to the more abstract (e.g., accessing available speakers and participating in ceremonies) will best preserve the language and help to provide the best learning opportunities for heritage language learners.

Second language programs have shown success in mainstream education in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. Public schools and local universities have started to offer Halq'eméylem as a second language option (Education, 2021; Learning Services Office, 2021; University of the Fraser Valley, 2021). Some First Nations Reserve Schools have made it obligatory within their K-12 programs, to teach and revitalize this language. In this case, there

may be opportunities to partner to create in-person or online spaces that support mentorship and language exposure for students and teachers, as suggested by the literature (Beaven, 2019).

Limitations of Language Programs

It is important to recognize the limitations and pitfalls that language programs face; so that, with resilient Indigenous communities, and all those working to revitalize language, these limitations may be addressed and avoided. Language programs until this point have fallen under global government ministries, governed by strict national, provincial, and state guidelines (Norris, 2006), consequently student voice is often missing from language programs. First Nations students need to be able to work from a place of strength rather than just existing within a Eurocentric system, that has focused "legislative authority to accomplish cultural genocide" (MacMath & Hall, 2018, p. 88). It is important to view First Nations language learning with a social justice lens as many of the language learners have had experiences of marginalization and social inequity that have influenced exposure to language (Cummins, 1992). For today's students, it is not realistic to try to move forward in learning the language without also learning the history and context of what has brought them to this moment in time. It is important to reflect upon the impact of residential schools, the 60's scoop, and the Indian Act as precursors to the "language death" of Indigenous languages (Flores, Gurel, & Putnam, 2020, p. 8). Including student voice in the development of heritage language programs will be a significant step to empower equity-seeking groups who are often marginalized in the current system.

The impacts of systematic racism inherent in the current system could be mitigated if there is a shift that includes taking into account the social/emotional classroom environment. It is important to remember the moral and professional responsibility a teacher has to lead students on a journey to a shared goal/vision. The *process* is more important than the end *product* (Little

Bear, 2000). It is a journey that includes reciprocity, relationships, and reconciliation (Archibald, 2008; Little Bear, 2000; MacMath & Hall, 2018). As educators and leaders, being accountable to self and students creates an environment of trust which gains relational capital and a bar must be set that is both ambitious and manageable, and when students see themselves *in* the process, they will be more likely to commit *to* the process (Safir, 2017). Studies have shown that "students learn in stages where progress is facilitated by a teacher, or a more fluent speaker, who continues to provide input slightly beyond the level of the student" (Berlin, 2000, p. 28). Maintaining a classroom environment that includes student voice is integral to finding a balance between *leading* students through the curriculum, and teaching them to *be leaders* despite their inherited history of cultural oppression.

Summary

It is important to try to develop heritage language programs that honor and reflect the histories, land, people, and communities of the students, and it is equally paramount that student voice and agency are considered when looking at refining such a program. Students as co-constructors may show increased participation and be more intrinsically motivated to become lifelong learners of their heritage language. Heritage second language programs are vital in producing more language speakers to help preserve and revitalize languages that are near extinction.

It is through humility, self-reflection, and collaboration that a successful program will endure the countless and sometimes conflicting perspectives and worldviews that are causing a loss of heritage languages worldwide. Most Coast Salish People learn English at home and have little access to their heritage languages outside of formal instruction. With one fluent speaker left to help guide understanding of the Halq'eméylem language, it is the responsibility of the whole

community to help move the language forward and carry the weight of Halq'eméylem revitalization. The phrase "it takes a village" has new meaning and significance when everyone comes together to participate in learning and preserving a heritage language. While the instructor of heritage languages has considerable influence, the development of a successful program must be an organic process in which the student has agency over their own understanding and experiences with their heritage language and traditional culture.

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

Growing up in a Westernized home, then learning about my Indigenous culture as a young adult, my ontological perspectives are fluid – I perceive the world in multiple ways. It is important to use both Western and Indigenous knowledge to answer the question 'What are students' perspectives of their current high school heritage language courses?'. Western knowledge is predicated on gaining knowledge through examining the writings of those who have extensive experience. The only knowledge that 'counts' from my Western perspective would be knowledge gained from 'masters' in their field. As learners in the Western worldview, bound by facts and protocols, we are required to cite our sources and acknowledge the work that has been done by others.

At war with my 'Western' worldview – the head thoughts – are the beliefs I feel in the deepest part of my soul – the heart thoughts. My interactions with the world and those around me come from a place of 'instinct', and the feeling of 'what is right' guides my actions and beliefs. It is therefore important to do things in a good way (MacMath & Hall, 2018). The way for me comes from Archibald's *Indigenous Storywork* (2008) and specifically the 'four Rs' that guide this research: respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity representing a holistic form of

knowledge development. My understanding of the four Rs stems from learning the culture, as a young adult, and being immersed into ceremonies through work and personal connections with the community. I see these Rs as guiding what and how I do research.

My epistemological stance begins with the most critical 'R', Respect – listening to the participants' stories and seeing them as drivers of this research (Archibald, 2008). Acknowledging a person's experience and time is important when working with someone who is willing to share their knowledge. It is through humility and gratitude that respect is shown to the teacher (in this case participant). It is through their feedback, life lessons, and experience that knowledge will be gained and passed on. The teachings brought forward come from a long history of others who have been willing to pass on their knowledge. Having a close relationship with the participants, knowing their stories, brings a depth of understanding to the knowledge they share. Respect is for both the interaction with the participants, and for the stories being told, and how to handle both with care (Archibald, 2008). It is the student voices that are critical to this study and it is important to hold those voices and stories in the highest esteem.

Responsibility comes from acknowledging the participants' accounts as truthfully and as accurately as possible, letting the stories unfold as they were shared, and not allowing our biases, perceptions, or interpretations to change the story (Archibald, 2008). It is important to always listen with an open heart and mind. In Stó:lō culture, those doing the ceremonial work are dressed with cedar headbands, so the mind is clear of negativity and are open to the 'work' that is to be done. It is the responsibility of the researcher in this context to approach this work with care and to acknowledge that the community in which this study is being conducted is not the home territory of the researcher and the information and results of this study stem from the researcher's personal understanding of the culture. This work includes ethical responsibilities to

the participants and respecting the work they choose to share. Leaving all other distractions aside is the responsibility of the individual(s) doing the work. According to this principle, researchers should rid themselves of these other variables which is why blankets and prayers are used in ceremony to cleanse those doing the work.

Reverence for the knowledge, and all those who are sharing their experience within the ceremony, is key to learning from participants. Through Indigenous perspectives, knowledge is gained through experience and life lessons, and we are taught to appreciate knowledge in whatever way it comes to you – as the giver, or receiver, of information. Archibald (2008) explains that reverence is shown through prayer, song, and story, and it is the teachings, prayers, songs, and stories of the local community that I used to guide this research. In a ceremony, those doing the work and sharing the knowledge are covered with a blanket over the heart to ensure that the work is being done with good intentions. Similarly, research done in a Western context has an ethical process to follow (See Appendix A for ethics approval), and also should be done with good intentions. In this research, reverence for my participants' knowledge was crucial. This reverence extends to all the researchers who have come before and have added to this research.

Reciprocity is the act of giving back and being mindful that a balance is always maintained. Giving more than you receive is a sign of good upbringing and status, and the truly generous give not only of their estate but also of their teachings (Carlson & McHalsie, 1998). Witnesses to our ceremonies are given gifts to acknowledge their becoming part of the teachings being shared. Giving back is not only the way forward, but also how we show respect for those sharing and receiving. As a researcher my research must give back to the participants and my community, incorporating respect and responsibility through the dissemination of this study

(Davidson, 2016). Hopefully, this study will also contribute to researchers who come after as well. It is my belief that responsibility to knowledge in both the Western and the Indigenous worldviews involves completing the circle of learning so that learning is a continuum: cyclical, and actionable for others.

Method

A case study is one of the best methods for an in-depth focus on a specific challenge or situation. To answer the question of, 'What are students' perspectives of their current high school heritage language courses?', this qualitative single intrinsic case study with a bounded system (Creswell & Poth, 2018) will include real student voices. The bounded system refers to the study having specific boundaries within time and place that "has interrelated parts that form a whole" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 321). In this study, the bounded system is the current Halq'eméylem language program at a rural First Nations school. To be an intrinsic case study means that "it holds intrinsic or unusual interest" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 322). This study is intrinsic because the heritage language is spoken only within a distinct geographic location by specific First Nations individuals. The individual parts of this study look at the importance of learning a heritage language from a student perspective and contributing to the overall improvement of Halq'eméylem language courses within local First Nations communities. It is hoped that parts of this research will extend to the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous heritage languages across the world.

Data Sources

The Halq'eméylem course in this study is a linear second-language course that is offered at a rural school with a high Indigenous student population. There are no prerequisites to any of the Halq'eméylem courses from grades nine to twelve. These high school courses are intended to

encompass more advanced proficiency in the language; however, students come into the grade nine course with varying degrees of knowledge. Students who attended this school since kindergarten have many years of experience with the language, but others who transfer to the school in higher grades do not. In five years of teaching high school Halq'eméylem, I have seen many students coming into the grade nine course with a limited vocabulary. As a result of the wide range of student proficiency, this high school language course functions at a largely introductory level.

It is critical to identify the "intent and case (or cases) for the study as well as case sampling procedure" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 101). The intent is to improve the current Halq'eméylem course and to encourage student voices as 'co-constructors' of their learning. In this study I used a purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A major benefit to these participants being at the same school where I, the researcher, work, is the existing relationships that have been established with the participants, allowing them to feel safe. My current and extensive relationship with the school and Band is paramount to the authenticity, reverence, and respect that has gone into the research and the interactions with the participants. While the sample is convenient, the voice of these participants is crucial to the progress of the current language program. The recruitment of these participants focuses on the importance of their contribution to the research study.

Data Tool

Usually in case studies multiple sources are used; however, due to the impact of COVID-19, it was impossible to use the other data sources that were originally planned. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize the importance of "extensive data collection, drawing on multiple data sources" (Creswell & Poth 2018, pg.101). COVID-19 restrictions limited the interactions and

sources available to the researcher. As the participants' teacher, the ethical boundaries also limited this research due to my direct interactions with the participants. Given these limitations, a comprehensive questionnaire was used (Appendix B). The questionnaire students filled out was designed with a variety of short and long responses along with multiple-choice questions shaped by those successes and challenges noted in the literature. The multifaceted approach to this questionnaire across four different grades allowed for multiple aspects of data collection through one source. From a student perspective, the questionnaire was presented as an opportunity to share their opinions and give feedback about their current language course.

The researcher/teacher presented this opportunity during each regular language class in the form of a recruitment poster shared on the class through online zoom courses. Originally, students would have been recruited in class; due to COVID, classes were suspended and online learning was put in place on December 2nd, 2020. An amendment for ethical review had to be submitted. Due to COVID protocols there were no in person classes at my research site (school), and as a result, in place of my original approved plan, consent and assent letters were sent out through the school's delivery system for students and parents to fill in within a two-week timeframe.

The assent and consent forms were put in self-addressed stamped envelopes and addressed to the vice-principal as a third-party to ensure student confidentiality. Participants filled out the questionnaires in their own home. Only those with guardian consent had their questionnaires forwarded to the researcher. As all questionnaires were anonymous, students could choose to not send back the questionnaires in the mail which was interpreted as their choice to not participate in the study. Students wishing to withdraw from participating in the

study had until March 12th, 2021, a period of two weeks after receiving the questionnaire, to let the third-party know not to forward the questionnaires to the researcher.

Students in grade nine to twelve were chosen to be a part of this study because the data collected would help drive changes to the structure of the classes I teach. Of the 36 students in grades nine to twelve, none were excluded from participating. It was my intent to use this research to include student voice in changes to the course outline and activities within the course, and it is important for the students to see that their participation is valued. Of the 36 participants who were sent questionnaires, eight responses were returned to the third party. These eight responses form the data that was analyzed for this study.

Data Analyses

The next step in the case study process is to "specify the analysis approach for developing case description(s) based on themes and contextual information" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pg. 101). There are two parts to the data analyses: the first part looked at the quantitative multiple-choice data, and the second part looked at the qualitative short and long answer questions. These types of data were integrated and analyzed together in the final analysis to create a nuanced understanding of participants' perspectives as described in the results section. The first part of data analyses examined descriptive statistics for the multiple-choice answers. This included two pie charts to show a snapshot of all the participants' voices. The pie charts provide a quick reference to the percentage of students and their preference to each answer within the questionnaire.

The second part of the data analyses analyzed the data collected from the short and long answer questions. The narrative data emerged in response to specific questions from the questionnaires using a priori organization. I examined each of the questions using descriptive

coding to determine the important points. Descriptive coding is a word or short phrase that identifies the "basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (Saldana, 2016, p. 102). When reporting on these topics I worked from both prevalence and salience. Prevalence refers to the recurring themes that are shared by several participants. Salience refers to impactful and useful comments that, while they may not have as many participants reporting on the topic, are particularly illustrative.

To create an illustrative story, the next step in case study, there was a blending of qualitative and quantitative data. The combination of these two types of data informed the description of the case study. Having an overarching theme to the research suggests a larger story that aims to have the participants' voices to guide the analyses. The larger theme represents a story to which the participants belong and "remind us of who we are" (Kovach, 2009, p. 94). The story was purposeful, it allowed for actionable development (Kovach, 2009). Thinking about this from an Indigenous perspective takes us back to the responsibility piece, having the researcher become the witness, with the job of the witness to share the work that has been done accurately and authentically.

The last step in a case study is to "report the interpreted meaning of the case and lessons learned by using case assertions" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pg.101). This, from an Indigenous perspective, is the reciprocity – the sharing of knowledge. What are the key findings and learning that has been realized? This is where the story starts to come together, and we can see what the Halq'eméylem courses look like through the students' eyes.

Managing Bias

As a new teacher who is also new to the language, I have no preexisting assumptions or expectations about student responses. I am not looking for specific topics or answers within the

questionnaires. The design of the questionnaire is based on the structure of the existing Halq'eméylem course with reference to the school mission statement, and the core ideas from the literature research. The questions were created to allow for a variety of responses. No parts of the Halq'eméylem course were excluded, so participants could address any aspect with their responses. Additionally, an expert reader or supervisor reviewed the results for authenticity.

Connections to Indigenous 'Ways of Knowing'

There are pathways to gaining knowledge using either Western or Indigenous methods, and it is up to the knowledge seeker to find the best practice for their purpose. Acknowledgement of the knowledge holder is integral in both paradigms, but the way in which it is demonstrated varies (e.g., citations in a Western paper or speaking of ancestors in an Indigenous ceremony). Circling back to Archibald's (2008) 'four Rs' and considering them in the Western context of this study, I have tried to incorporate *respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity* as holistically as possible.

While *respect* is traditionally shown to knowledge holders, I also want to respect the participants in this process. It was my privilege to be able to work with these students in this community, to assert that their voices are vitally important, and to ensure that the work being done reflects the magnitude of their opinions. Respect is to consider all those involved – their histories and their stories – and those who may benefit from this work in the future.

Responsibility in a Western context takes the form of ethical approvals that are externalized, and when done properly gives validity to the researchers' name. In Indigenous culture this responsibility is an internalized code of conduct that honors the family name (Litte Bear, 2000). My responsibility as the researcher is to tell the stories of the participants as authentically and truthfully as possible.

Reverence is the utmost respect that I have for not only my current language students, but also the future generations of heritage language students. This work is to potentially improve courses through a student-driven lens. The knowledge that has been shared with me about Indigenous community protocol and 'ways of knowing' (Anthony-Stevens & Stevens, 2017) is held with admiration and loyalty – people *entrusted* me with this knowledge. The importance of engaging with care in any situation, conversation, and with all people is paramount to the reverence I hold for the participants, community, and culture.

Reciprocity is the mutual benefit of this study – the knowledge I have gained, and the knowledge shared from this research. I hope that this inquiry *gives* more than it *receives*. Information gained from the participant responses will be shared with the community, students, and all those who teach Halq'eméylem, in the hope that this will facilitate the creation of programs that inspire students to further their education in their heritage language. In keeping with First Nations' principles of reciprocity, where the individual relates to the whole in a symbiotic nature, so too does student voice have an integral place in the formation of heritage language programs.

Results

Drawing Meaning

Looking at the overall data from the surveys and bearing in mind my own recent experiences as a language student, the results suggest that students are looking at language learning as a whole and considering language as a way of life. The overarching theme of the results suggests that students are positioning themselves within the narrative of First Nations history and seeing that history as an important part of their current identity, and the impetus for moving forward. These results begin to answer the question 'What are students' perspectives of

their current high school heritage language courses?'. The eight students who participated defined the student perspective of their current high school heritage language course, with an idea to improve future Halq'eméylem courses as sought out by the surveys. The emergent themes as described by the participants are discussed in the following order: Cultural context, spirituality, and language-learning.

Cultural Context

Broad First Nations History

Half of those surveyed reported that history should be incorporated in the language curriculum – broad history including the impact of residential schools, and other impactful events. A participant concern was expressed about the lack of historical context, relevance, and the *extinction* of First Nations languages, specifically how 'Orange Shirt Day', a day to honor residential school survivors, has become a form of tokenism. The disconnect was related by Participant 2 who stated it "seems the only time it [historical context] is spoken of is on Orange shirt day". Students requesting historical context in relation to the eradication of First Nations languages suggests that students are drawing meaning from language courses that relate to *identity* and *story*.

History of Language Learning

What stands out in the surveys is the request for incorporation of a historical understanding of Halq'eméylem speakers. When students wrote about 'history' it was always paired with 'culture', suggesting that students relate learning about the narrative history of Halq'eméylem to learning their culture. The recurring themes in the participants' responses were coded as *history and culture*, *Halq'eméylem, history* (stories), *speaking Halq'eméylem*, and *learning about culture*. As an example, Participant 1 responded that Halq'eméylem is important

because “It helps me understand my culture”. Significantly, students link *story* – language learning through historical learning – to *identity* ‘conversations in Halq’eméylem history (stories)’ as defined by Participant 6.

Community

The importance of ‘community’ is evident in student answers. Participants discussed the importance of attending ceremonies and events, bringing Elders into the classroom, learning from the land, deeper connections to the language speakers, and asking for *real life situations* such as buying items at the store. Participant 2 said that having more “outdoor traditional ways” of knowing/learning would improve future Halq’eméylem courses, as well as being more involved in “ceremonies and events”. Participant 5 expressed that “a deeper connection to those who only speak Halq’eméylem” would enrich the learning of the language. Participant 6 suggested that we bring Elders into class. The participants believe connection to community is important for their learning.

Tselhxwelméxw[9]

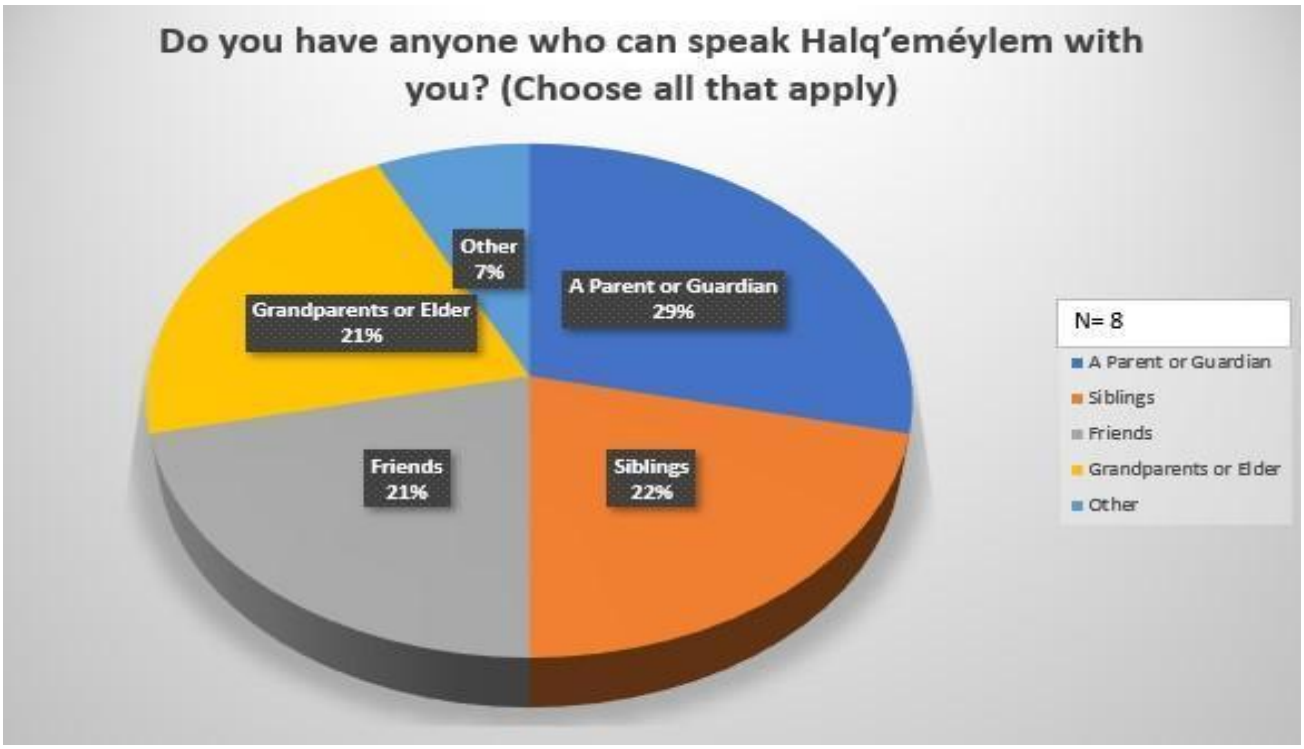
‘Family’ and ‘community’ are similar in context when thinking about language, especially when talking about smaller communities. For the purpose of this study, ‘family’ is distinguished here as strictly household members, even though most people in the community are also technically family. Students have strong connections within the community because of their family. The desire to uphold the family name and honor ancestors within a family context is tied

[9] Family – The word for First Nation person has the root ‘mekw’ in the word to emphasize the connection to everything else.

to community events and school. Figure 1 shows that all students have members of their family and community with whom they can speak Halq'eméylem outside of the classroom.

Figure 1

Halq'eméylem Speaker



Responses further show that 75% of students would like to speak Halq'eméylem with family members. This indicates a real-world desire to use the language and pass the language on to their "nieces and nephews", as indicated by Participant 2. Participant 1 expressed the desire to speak Halq'eméylem to their family members, and Participant 4 would like to speak Halq'eméylem with their "friends and peers". The desire to speak the language is evident in all the responses; however, it was these few that specified the desire to speak with family.

Spirituality

Ceremony

First Nations spirituality is a *way of learning* through ceremonies and events within the community. Spirituality was a salient finding recognized by Participant 1 and 2. Participant 1 would like to see a 'variety of prayers' used regularly in the classroom. Participant 2 indicated that they would like to be "involved with more ceremonies and events" and suggested using traditional names in the classroom. From my experience, traditional names are used in ceremonies as a form of connection to ancestors, and this is where individuals become a part of the *whole*. This is also part of how language is passed on through generations and language learning occurs. There is connection to history, people, and the land using traditional names that brings individuals closer to stories of their history, community, and family. Participant 2 talked about the importance of spirituality in making these kinds of community connections.

St'seheyelh[10]

Prayers was another salient theme that one participant had the courage to discuss. Prayers have their own special place within the spiritual realm. They align the self, work, and community to move forward with what needs to be done for the mind, heart, and physical form to be in unity with those who came before. According to Participant 1, one of their goals for Halq'eméylem is to learn several "varieties of prayers" to be used regularly in the classroom and in gatherings. The language of prayers in Halq'eméylem is especially important because meaning can be drawn from the roots of the words and connected to the larger spiritual entity of community and family. All gatherings start with prayers in the language, to connect past and present, and to focus busy

[10] Prayer(s) – The root meaning of 't'í:w' is 'slow beat' like that of a calm heart rate.

minds to the ‘work’ at hand – whether the work is a naming ceremony, graduation, or a family dinner.

Language Learning

Mechanics of Language

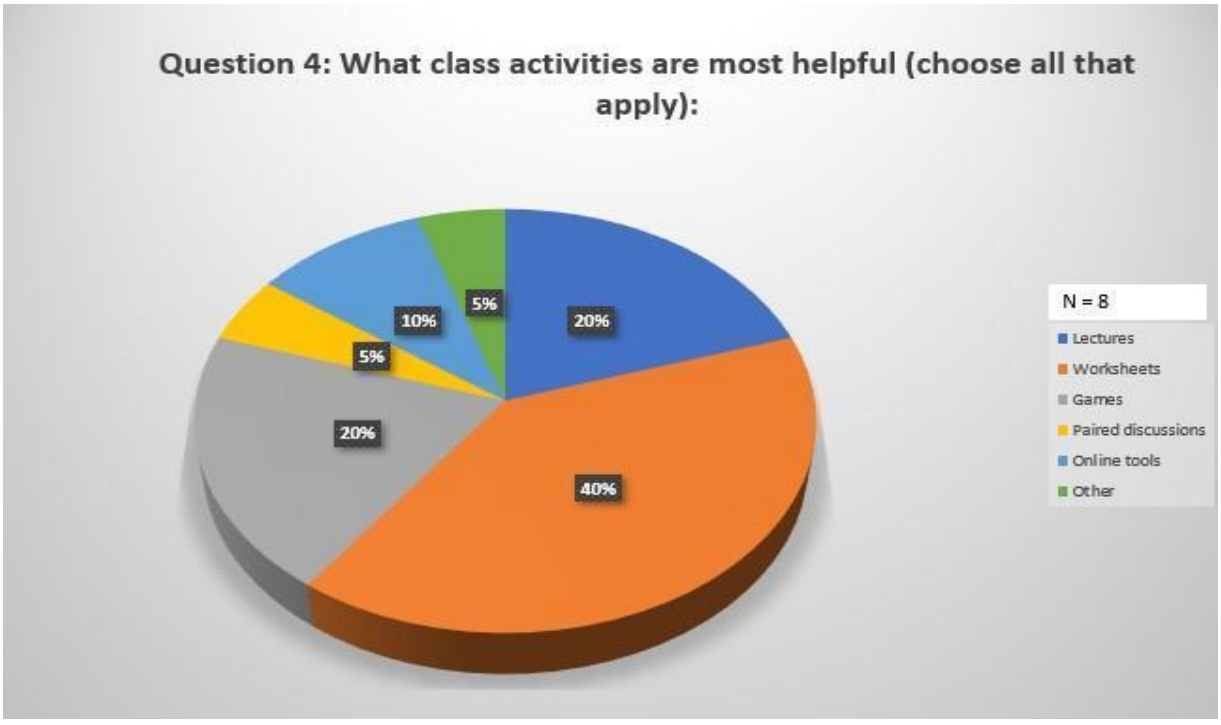
Every one of the participants expressed a need for the language to be organically represented in the learning process. Responses from questionnaires included, “Speaking outdoors” (Participant 2), learning the language of “everyday conversation” (Participants 2, 6, and 7), extending their vocabulary to “say things in sentences” (Participants 3 and 6), “Speaking Halq’eméylem” (Participant 7), “creating new and personal speech in realistic scenarios” (Participants 5 and 7), being able to have “conversations in Halq’eméylem” (Participant 2), “carry a conversation” (Participant 7), and down to the basics of “pronouncing what we learn” (Participants 2, 6 and 7). Many First Nations cultures are predominantly oral cultures, and Halq’eméylem is a verb-rich language, so it makes sense that students want to learn the language by participating in ceremonies and events, connecting to the outdoors, and through real life experiences and scenarios. As an educator, it is exciting to see students expressing the desire to speak more in the language – especially when they have specific ideas as to how that can be integrated into the classroom.

The mechanics, or rules of a language, are taught in many ways, and students have expressed a desire to learn more grammar and to better understand sentence structures. The mechanics of language relate to being able to speak the language *fluently* and is a means to an end. It is interesting that students seemed to consider mechanics as secondary to drawing meaning from the language itself, which returns to the idea of cultural connection to language. Students know that sentence building is important and have expressed approaches that are

meaningful to them to learn the rules of the language. Students overall seemed to prefer worksheets, specifically the ones that relate to grammar (see Figure 2). In the past, when worksheets were given in our Language classes, it was usually for reinforcing grammar knowledge and for building sentences. Students referenced a variety of grammatical parts of speech that they view as significant such as: “start of sentences, end of sentences, and objects” (Participant 3), “past and present tense” (Participant 3), “phrases/sentences” (Participant 3 and 4), “basic phrases” (Participant 6), “more terms for short sentences, and how to form sentences w/ things like ‘li’ and other words that have multiple meanings” (Participant 6). While worksheets were chosen most often from the multiple-choice options as one of the most helpful class activities, it is worth noting that respondents also had a variety of other ideas when they were able to write their own responses.

Figure 2

Most Helpful Class Activities



In considering the activities they would find most helpful in class, students suggested having “more group projects”, being “involved in more ceremonies and events”, and entering the “Halq’eméylem contest” (a language competition that is held in conjunction with the University of the Fraser Valley that brings together high school students to test student skill in Halq’eméylem*)* (Participant 2). Students also requested having “more games” (Participants 4 and 6), using online tools such as “Kahoot” (game-stye user-generated multiple-choice quizzes) (Participant 4), and participating in more classroom games/competitions that give students the opportunity to physically get up and move around. Students recalled the effectiveness of past games that had been played in the classroom, and how they related favorably to their learning experience.

Learning Environment

The findings suggest it is important to students that their learning environment is comprised not only of the *physical* space around them, but also of the *social* atmosphere – between peers, and the relationship with the teacher. Since students expressed the desire to attend ceremonies and events as part of the language curriculum, any outings need to happen in a safe and culturally- and spiritually accepting space. This includes accounting for the differences in student learning styles, with some students being comfortable with public speaking and being *part* of the ceremony, whereas others may be shy and need a quiet, personal space in which to speak, and may need to be able to pass on speaking in public, if necessary (Participant 7). One participant expressed the need to have assessments done “in person” (Participant 7). This student also expressed that being put on the spot to speak the language “racks your brain”, so holding space for those that may be “shy” and allowing students time to express themselves in a safe environment is critically important.

Discussion

S'ólh Tém:éxw[11]

The goal of this study was to learn student perspectives on their current Halq'eméylem language course, as a way of understanding how Halq'eméylem classes should be shaped moving forward. More specifically, the driving question was, 'What are students' perspectives of their current high school heritage language courses?'. It was uncertain how the students would be able to balance 'wants' and 'needs', and whether they would be able to fully articulate them through their survey responses. The results obtained illuminate a need for a shift in thinking about the way future Halq'eméylem courses should be structured, as students were thinking about Halq'eméylem on a larger scale than that which the course currently provides. It is compelling to see that the results show the students are thinking about language in terms of culture, history, and personal context. Most of the responses in the research revealed that students were excited about connecting language to ceremonies, events, family, community, and history. As an educator I was already aware of the importance of understanding student histories and cultural context, but I did not realize the extent of their need to have culture and history align with other aspects of language learning. There are three key findings of the present research: *cultural context, spirituality*, and *language learning.*

Cultural context

Firstly, the cultural context, including historical/traditional knowledge, is a driver of the language that must include both community and family. Students have a strong desire to interact

[11] Welcome to our land. 'Ólh' means to get into – S' is a nominalizer (to make a noun). Tém:éxw (earth, land). Together it is welcome to our land.

with the language in as many ways as possible. They have requested to learn more about residential schools – not just in relation to periodic events such as 'Orange Shirt Day' – and how this may have impacted their *own* story. This study clearly indicates that students identify their history through story. Many First Nations cultures have transformer stories of creation and the moral tales (Carlson & McHalsie, 1998). Many elements of culture and community are passed on through narratives, and historically this was the only way for the history to be passed on within a community (Carlson & McHalsie, 1998). There is a symbiotic relationship between the transformer stories and elements of community, family, nature, and language and this relationship emerged from the participants' responses in this study.

Researchers Ethel Gardner (2000) and Leroy Little Bear (2000) discuss the importance of stories and how the teachings link to identity, land, spirituality, and laws, and the present study has shown that students agree. This pattern of results is consistent with the previous literature in which Norris (2006) suggests speaking one's own language helps one understand their identity in relation to family and community. The students' calls for engagement in events and ceremonies are consistent with this claim. Many students have indicated they have family and community members with whom they can communicate and use the language, and they are asking for more opportunities to do so by participating in local ceremonies and events. Students may wish to use language to strengthen their ties to community and family, as well as deepen their own understanding of their identities.

Spirituality

The second finding was a new and unexpected discovery around 'spirituality'. Students identified ceremony and prayer as a salient feature of language learning; and although this was somewhat surprising, it is consistent with the claim that interacting with community, Elders,

events, and ceremonies increases oral development when learning a second language (Anthony-Stevens & Stevens, 2017). Initially, this connection could be seen as valuable as a mechanical or proficiency support; however, in looking again at the literature from a spiritual perspective, there is a significant connection between language and spirituality, as evidenced in Ethel's point of view of exploring language from "the deepest recesses of our soul to know what it means for us personally to be committed to the renewal effort" (Gardner, 2000). There is a process of learning and understanding that happens through *story* in ceremonies and events held in the community, rooted in the *language*. The connection to spirituality is about the totality of the community – the process of learning language may be individualized, but the purpose relates to the beliefs around the connections to everything. In the introduction I talked about "mekw' tel sq'èq'ó" which means "all my relations". It is this same drive that provided the impetus for this research – the desire to rebuild a language, culture, and collective together because we are all connected.

Language Learning

Thirdly, because language learning includes oral communication and learning, having an unbiassed, supportive classroom environment is important to the students who are cautious to participate in oral classroom activities. Feeling safe and 'heard' within the physical classroom space, is necessary before real learning can take place. Learning the 'mechanics 'of the language is important to everyday speech, and to the understanding of language within the bigger picture; however, for this to occur, students need to feel secure and that they belong in the classroom community. This feeling of safety is key for students to engage with and interact with the language from multiple sources in multiple ways, as suggested by the research (Archibald, 2008; Beaven, 2019; Guevremont & Kohen, 2019; Anthony-Stevens & Stevens, 2017; Berlin, 2000; Flores, Gurel, & Putnam, 2020). Students expressed the desire to have learning opportunities that

include action-based environments, and which embody real-life scenarios. The games, worksheets, and activities the students all liked were ones with high levels of movement and interaction (Guevremont & Kohen, 2019; Morcom, 2017; Singh & Reyhner, 2013; Usborne, Peck, Smith, & Taylor, 2011) Students learn best when involved in a myriad of activities that are ideally linked to their cultural and traditional territory.

In summary, it appeared that participants in this study valued cultural context/histories, spirituality, and language learning similar to results found in existing successful language programs. Successful programs overcame challenges by increasing student identity through cultural teachings, by connecting to the community, providing opportunities to meaningfully practice the language, and by collecting tools and resources (Albury, 2018; Beaven, 2019; Froiland, Davison, & Worrell, 2016). Opportunities for co-construction were presented to students within the questionnaire by asking "What are your goals for Halq'eméylem?" (Appendix B). Participating in this study, gave students the opportunity to become part of the dialogue around the creation of the language program, potentially increasing their motivation to participate in the language.

Limitations

There are three limitations to this research concerning the results of this study. The first limitation concerns the pandemic. COVID-19 has limited the sources and interactions available, participants were never seen in person, participants had to be mailed their questionnaires, there were only 8 responses of a potential 36, and the amendments had to be made to ethics due to the online learning that occurred. Being unable to hold the sharing circle, and interviews with students, due to the COVID pandemic, it was impossible get the other sources of data that were originally planned. The limited response to the questionnaires impacted the ability to use

descriptive statistics. The graphs accurately show the response of those who participated, but did not represent the group as a whole.

The second limitation is the group of individuals who filled out the surveys is from a specific school in a specific geographic location. The group of students who were asked to participate were students from grade nine to twelve, so it would be difficult to generalize these results to elementary students, even within the same school. It is also hard to conclude that students from a local public school would find the same results, as these schools have populations of students from different communities and different backgrounds. These conditions could provide additional information if the study were extended into different contexts.

The third limitation is a voluntary response survey. Those with the strongest opinions on the subject were most likely to be the ones to respond. Students who are more likely to participate in community events, ceremonies, and have family and friends who can speak Halq'eméylem with them are most likely to be the students who have responded. Potentially not all students would draw the same depth of meaning from language learning as was represented by these more passionate students who took the time to respond.

Implications and Recommendations

Despite these limitations, these results suggest several theoretical and practical implications. A theoretical implication of this work is that the research was strengthened by drawing on both Indigenous and Western worldviews. Weaving together diverse worldviews is symbolic of the complexities of heritage language learning, which also needs to incorporate and account for multiple contemporary and traditional points of view. This research study was presented as a story, using specific language – in particular the use of phrases associated with cultural events, such as 'doing the work in a good way', 'opening and closing a ceremony', and

‘our children are our most precious resource’. It is through using these phrases and defining cultural understandings that I have tried to create a bridge between two worlds.

Based on results from this study, heritage language teachers might consider structuring their classrooms to be more consistent with cultural protocols so that language learning is embedded within all aspects of the program. Students want to see more prayers, which traditionally take place before any work is done. Each class could start the same way any event or ceremony starts with a speaker who opens on the floor and then has an Elder or respected woman to lead the prayer. Since I plan to teach my Halq’eméylem lessons with traditional protocols I would like students to create/make drums for songs to use in class. Each ceremony or event is tied to the natural cyclical nature in the environment. Teaching the yearlong course will follow the Stó:lō calendar; this has been an ongoing project but will be a priority in future year plans. For example, the Stó:lō calendar follows the lunar year, which starts in the fall, and is based on the cyclical renewals (e.g., hunting and gathering) that happen throughout the year. Each month students would learn about traditional teachings, events, and ceremonies as they relate to the Stó:lō year.

In the larger landscape of leadership, I have begun to think about mentorship and how Halq’eméylem could connect other communities as well. For example, within the educational community, this research has created a passion to connect with others who are teaching and learning the language. I would like to set up a mentorship program that allows students to connect with Halq’eméylem mentors (outside of the pandemic). My hope is to connect students from other schools, students with speakers within their community or other communities, and even big buddies within our school for Halq’eméylem language opportunities. Providing opportunities for students to have a scaffolded access point to the language (e.g., high school

students reading and creating beginner-level Halq'eméylem books to kindergarteners), accounts for different levels of proficiency and allows everyone opportunities for success.

Co-Constructors

Including the broad narrative of Indigenous history in language learning is a significant request made by students desiring to have a holistic understanding of Indigenous ties to their heritage language. This begins by focusing on First Nations students voices through the collaborative feedback and design of the current Halq'eméylem language program. Co-constructing, working together as equals, is an important part of building connection and intrinsic motivation. Throughout their lives students have been witness to the partnerships, relationships, and collaboration within the community, and becoming co-constructors of the language program allows their voice to become a part of the narrative. Students requesting local cultural history and the history of Halq'eméylem language speakers to be included in the course, suggests a curiosity and desire to draw meaningful connections to lifelong cultural and language learning. All participants mentioned wanting to connect to, or learn more about, their culture. Desiring cultural aspects to be incorporated into the Halq'eméylem language curriculum suggests that students are trying to connect to their roots and identity – not only in relation to the language, but also within the context of community and family. The incorporation of spirituality, including ceremonies, events, and prayers in class, also suggest a larger framework and connection that students have identified as a part of Halq'eméylem language learning.

Clearly, the *mechanics* of a language is an important part of language learning – but only comprises part of the interconnected web of what an effective heritage language course needs to be. The student-expressed desire to speak the language more fluently and to understand the connection of root word meanings will be attained most effectively within the framework of

learning language *alongside* culture and history. Students who are engaged on all these levels of cultural context, language learning, and spirituality contribute to a classroom environment of excitement, curiosity, and empowerment.

This study has enhanced my understanding of what my students would like to see in terms of content and structure. I have already begun to make changes within the work I have been giving students. The last assignment that I posted in Google Classrooms was a read aloud for my grade 10-12's. The story was given in English and Halq'eméylem along with an audio recording to follow along. The assignment was scaffolded with links to prior knowledge such as identifying nouns, verbs, and adjectives within the story; however, students were then given a slide show lesson on transitive and intransitive verbs both in English and Halq'eméylem. I found that it was important to see how the rules look in English and then Halq'eméylem and how speech changes from one language to another. This is a direct result of the findings from this study.

Kw'étslóme[12]

Reflecting on the act of mentorship, one is reminded of Elders who give their traditional knowledge to future generations to ensure the continuation of language and culture. This act of sustainability reminds me of Bandura's premise of human agency: *we are not products of historical circumstances* and have the ability to generate a myriad of pathways towards a better future (Bandura, 2006). Our choices and personal agency give us the freedom to become agents of change. I hope that by including student voice, students can recognize their capabilities and create a Halq'eméylem program which allows them to pursue their language and culture in a

[12] 'See you'- ending a conversation, but not really saying 'good-bye'.

manner that is appropriate to them. As we learnt at the beginning of the master's program servant leaders put the needs of the followers first, they embrace their growth, and share control. The synergistic performance of all contributors enhances the communal efforts in revitalizing Indigenous languages. As one of my professors said to me, you are a fraction, of a percent, of a fraction who can say *I made it here* (M.Woods, personal communication, 2019). If you think of this in terms of language, we are a fraction of a fraction left of people who *get* to learn our heritage languages. Through heritage language programs like this one, we increase the opportunities to share this honor in the future.

As is traditional protocol for the 'closing' of a ceremony, I would like to thank all those who have participated in this work, and to remind all the witnesses (readers) of their responsibility to remember and pass on what was learned here together. In this way, my work becomes a part of our collective history.

Mekw' tel sq'éq'ó

References

Albury, N. J. (2018). "If we lose their language we lose our history": Knowledge and disposition in Maori language acquisition policy. *Journal of Language Identity & Education*, 1-16.

Anthony-Stevens, V., & Stevens, P. (2017). 'A space for you to be who you are': an ethnographic portrait of reterritorializing Indigenous student identities. *Discourse: Studies in the Culture Politics of Education*, 328-341.

Archibald, J.-a. (2008). *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit.* UBC Press.

Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Assoication for psychological science*, 164-180.

Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spririt.* Purich Publishing, An Imprint of UBC Press.

Beaven, T. (2019). "Your language development": harnessing openness to integrate idependent language learning into the curriculum. In A. Comas-Quinn, A. Beaven, & B. Sawhill, *New case studies of openness in and beyond the language classroom* (pp. 145-156). Research-publishing.net.

Berlin, L. N. (2000). The benefits of second language acquisition and teaching for Indigenous language educators. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 19-35.

Carlson, K. T., & McHalsie, S. (1998). *I am Stó:lō: Katherine explores her heritage.* Stó:lō Heritage Trust.

Carlson, K. T., & McHalsie, S. (1998). *I am Stó:lō: Katherine explores her heritage.* Stó:lō Heritage Trust.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches.* Sage.

Cummins, J. (1992). The empowerment of Indian students. *Teaching American Indian students*, 3-12.

Davidson, S. F. (2016). Following the Song of K'aad 'aww (Dogfish Mother): Adolescent Perspectives on English 10 First Peoples, Writing, and Identity. *The University of the British Columbia*.

Education, I. (2021, April 22nd). *Indigenous Education*. Retrieved from Abbotsford School District: https://indigenous.abbyschools.ca/node/54603

Flores, C., Gurel, A., & Putnam, M. T. (2020). Different perspectives on critical factors in heritage language development and maintenance. *Language Learning*, 5-14.

Froiland, F. M., Davison, M. L., & Worrell, F. C. (2016). Aloha teachers: Teacher autonomy support promotes Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students' motivation, school belonging, course taking, and math achievment. *Social Psychology of Education*, 879-894.

Froiland, J. M., Davison, M. L., & Worrel, F. C. (2016). Aloha teachers: teacher autonomy support promotes Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students' motivation, school belonging, course-taking and math achievement. *Social Psychology of Education* , 879-894.

Froiland, J. M., Davison, M. L., & Worrell, F. C. (2016). Aloha teachers: teacher autonomy support promotes Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students' motivation, school belonging, course-taking and math achievement. *Social Psychology of Education*, 879-894.

Gardner, E. B. (2000). Where there are always wild strawberries. *Canadian journal of Native Education*, 7-13.

Gossen, D. (2020, March 26th). *Real Restitution*. Retrieved from Restitution in Schools: https://realrestitution.com/restitution-in-schools/

Greymorning, S. (1997). Going beyond words: the Arapaho Immersion Program. In J. Reyhner, *Teaching Idigenous Langagues* (pp. 22-30). Northern Arizona University.

Guevremont, A., & Kohen, D. (2019). Speaking an Aboriginal language and school outcomes for Canadian First Nations children living off reserve. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Biligualism*, 518-529.

Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies.* University of Toronto Press.

Learning Services Office. (2021, April 22nd). *Halq'emeylem*. Retrieved from Chilliwack School District: https://learningservices.sd33.bc.ca/halqemeylem

Little Bear, L. (2000). Jagged Worldviews Colliding. In M. Battiste, *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (pp. 77-85). UBC .

MacMath, S., & Hall, W. (2018). Indigenous Education: Using the science of storywork to teach with and within instead of about Indigenous peoples. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 86-106.

Marian, V., & Shook, A. (2012). The cognitive benefits of being bilingual. *Cerebrum: the Dana forum on brain science*, 1-12.

Morcom, L. A. (2017). Self-esteem and cultural identity in Aboriginal langague immersion kindergarteners. *Journal of Langauge, Identity & Education*, 365-380.

Norris, M. J. (2006). Aboriginal languages in Canada: Trends and perspectives on maintenance and revitalization. In J. P. White, S. Wingert, D. Beavon, & P. Mxim, *Aboriginal policy research: Moving forward, making a difference* (pp. 197-226). Thompson Educational Publishing.

Norris, M. J. (2011). Aboriginal Languages in Urban Canada: A decade in review, 1996-2006. *Aboriginal Policy Studies*, 4-67.

Safir, S. (2017). *The Listening Leader.* Jossey-Bass.

Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* Sage.

Singh, N. K., & Reyhner, J. (2013). Indigenous Knowledge and pedagogy for Indigenous children. In J. Reyner, J. Martin, L. Lockard, & W. Gilbert, *Honoring Our Children* (pp. 37-52). Arizona: Northern Arizona University.

Toulouse, P. R. (2016). *Achieving Indigenous student success: A guide for secondary classrooms.* PorrFW & Main Press.

University of the Fraser Valley. (2021, April 22nd). *Halq'emeylem*. Retrieved from University of the Fraser Valley: https://www.ufv.ca/calendar/current/CourseDescriptions/HALQ.htm

Usborne, E., Peck, J., Smith, D.-L., & Taylor, D. M. (2011). Learning through an Aboriginal Language: The impact on students' English and Aboriginal Language skills. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 200-215.

Appendix A

Ethics Approval

Research, Engagement, & Graduate Studies
33844 King Rd
Abbotsford BC V2S 7M8

Tel: (604) 557-4011
Research.Ethics@ufv.ca
Website: www.ufv.ca/research-ethics

Human Research Ethics Board - Certificate of Ethical Approval - Amendment
HREB Protocol No: 100582
Principal Investigator: Ms. Nicole Joseph
Team Members: Ms. Nicole Joseph (Principal Investigator)
Dr. Nikki Yee (Supervisor)
Ms. Awneet Sivia (Supervisor)
Dr. Sheryl MacMath (Course Instructor)

Title: Student perceptions of a Halq'emeylem language program.
Department: Faculty of Professional Studies\Teacher Education

Effective: February 19, 2021
Expiry: January 14, 2022

The Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) has reviewed and approved the ethics of the of the above research. The HREB is constituted and operated in accordance with the requirements of the UFV Policy on Human Research Ethics and the current Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.

The approval is subject to the following conditions:
1. Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Approval is for one year. A Request for Renewal must be submitted 2-3 weeks before the above expiry date.
3. Modifications to the approved research must be submitted as an Amendment to be reviewed and approved by the HREB before the changes can be implemented. If the changes are substantial, a new request for approval must be sought. *An exception can be made where the change is necessary to eliminate an immediate risk to participant(s) (TPCS2 Article 6.15). Such changes may be implemented but must be reported to the HREB within 5 business days.
4. If an adverse incident occurs, an Adverse Incident Event form must be completed and submitted.
5. During the project period, the HREB must be notified of any issues that may have ethical implications.
*__NEW__ 6. A Final Report Event Form must be submitted to the HREB when the research is complete or terminated.

**If applicable please submit your updated Research Continuity Plan to REGS@ufv.ca before beginning your research. The plan can be found here: https://www.ufv.ca/research/
Thank you, and all the best with your research.
UFV Human Research Ethics Board

Appendix B

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. I would like to remind you that you can decide not to participate anytime, up until you hand this in. All questionnaires are anonymous and will be kept confidential.

1) I prefer a teacher who: (Choose one)

- ❍ Pushes you to work hard
- ❍ Has high expectations
- ❍ Is not very demanding
- ❍ Other _____

2) During Halq'eméylem class, I would like to have: (Choose one)

- ❍ a combination of Halq'eméylem and English spoken
- ❍ as much English as possible spoken
- ❍ only Halq'eméylem spoken

3) Halq'eméylem is important to me because: (Choose one)

- ❍ It helps me understand culture
- ❍ It is a required course to graduate
- ❍ It looks good on university applications
- ❍ I want to talk to people in another language
- ❍ Other _____

4) What class activities are most helpful: (Choose all that apply)

- ☐ Lectures
- ☐ Worksheets
- ☐ Games
- ☐ Pair Discussions
- ☐ Online tools (Kahoot, story jumper ect.)
- ☐ Other

_____

5) Do you know anyone who can speak in Halq'eméylem with you? (Choose all that apply)

- ☐ A parent or guardian
- ☐ Siblings
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Grandparents or Elder
- ☐ Other

_____

6) What would you like to focus on in Halq'eméylem class? : (Answer in point form or short sentences)

7) What are your goals for Halq'eméylem? How can your teacher support you in your goals? : (Answer in point form or short sentences)

Goals	**Teacher Support**

8) What improvements would you suggest for a future Halq'eméylem course? : (Answer in point form or short sentences)

9) Talk about a time you learnt a lot in class? Why do you think you learnt so much during that class? (Answer in point form or short sentences)

10) What topics would you like to focus on in class? : (Answer in point form or short sentences)